Colorectal Cancer develops slowly over a number of years. Before the cancer grows in the colon, polyps are the first to appear. Colorectal polyps are very common, occurring in 15-20% of adults and this prevalence increases with age.

What Are Polyps?
A polyp is an abnormal tissue growth or tumour that appears on the inner lining of the colon or rectum. Polyps can be:
- Benign: A non-cancerous tumour or tissue growth
- Malignant: Cancerous growth of polyps

There are 2 types of Polyps:

**Adenomatous Polyps (Adenomas)**
These polyps are a pre-cancerous condition. Fewer than 10% of all adenomas become cancerous. However, more than 95% of colorectal cancers develop from adenomas.

**Hyperplastic and Inflammatory Polyps**
These polyps are generally considered non-cancerous. If hyperplastic polyps are growing in the ascending colon, there may be an increased risk of developing adenomas and cancer.

**FROM A POLYP TO COLORECTAL CANCER**

**TIMELINE: 10–15 YEARS**

When Polyps are present, they grow slowly in the wall of the colon or rectum and on average take 10-15 years to become cancer.

**Having polyps in the colon increases one’s risk of cancer; hence the removal of polyps through a colonoscopy screening is necessary.**

**TYPES OF CANCERS IN THE COLON AND RECTUM**

- **Adenocarcinomas**
  Adenocarcinomas are the most common type of colorectal cancers. They originate from cells that make glands to produce mucus which does the work of lubricating the colon and rectum.

- **Gastrointestinal Stromal Tumours (GISTs)**
  These tumours may grow in the digestive tract and may be either cancerous or non-cancerous. They originate from specialised cells in the wall of the colon.

- **Lymphoma**
  These tumours usually originate from the lymph nodes and they affect the immune system cells. They may also start from the colon, rectum and other organs.

- **Carcinoid Tumours**
  These tumours originate from hormone producing cells in the intestine.

- **Sacromas**
  The blood vessels are where these tumours start from. The muscle and connective tissue in the colon and rectum are other starting points.